

CHAPTER XXVIII

One friend Michael made among the many animals he encountered in the Cedarwild School, and a strange, sad friendship it was. Sara she was called, a small, green monkey from South America, who seemed to have been born hysterical and indignant, and with no appreciation of humour. Sometimes, following Collins about the arena, Michael would meet her while she waited to be tried out on some new turn. For, unable or unwilling to try, she was for ever being tried out on turns, or, with little herself to do, as a filler-in for more important performers.

But she always caused confusion, either chattering and squealing with fright or bickering at the other animals. Whenever they attempted to make her do anything, she protested indignantly; and if they tried force, her squalls and cries excited all the animals in the arena and set the work back.

"Never mind," said Collins finally. "She'll go into the next monkey band we make up."

This was the last and most horrible fate that could befall a monkey on the stage, to be a helpless marionette, compelled by unseen sticks and wires, poked and jerked by concealed men, to move and act throughout an entire turn.

But it was before this doom was passed upon her that Michael made her acquaintance. Their first meeting, she sprang suddenly at him, a screaming, chattering little demon, threatening him with nails and teeth. And Michael, already deep-sunk in habitual moroseness merely looked at her calmly, not a ripple to his neck-hair nor a prick to his ears. The next moment, her fuss and fury quite ignored, she saw him turn his head away. This gave her pause. Had he sprung at her, or snarled, or shown any anger or resentment such as did the other dogs when so treated by her, she would have screamed and screeched and raised a hubbub of expostulation, crying for help and calling all men to witness how she was being unwarrantably attacked.

As it was, Michael's unusual behaviour seemed to fascinate her. She approached him tentatively, without further racket; and the boy who had her in charge slacked the thin chain that held her.

"Hope he breaks her back for her," was his unholy wish; for he hated Sara intensely, desiring to be with the lions or elephants rather than dancing attendance on a cantankerous female monkey there was no reasoning with.

And because Michael took no notice of her, she made up to him. It was not long before she had her hands on him, and, quickly after that, an arm around his neck and her head snuggled against his. Then began her interminable tale. Day after day, catching him at odd times in the ring, she would cling closely to him and in a low voice, running on and on, never pausing for breath, tell him, for all he knew, the story of her

life. At any rate, it sounded like the story of her woes and of all the indignities which had been wreaked upon her. It was one long complaint, and some of it might have been about her health, for she sniffed and coughed a great deal and her chest seemed always to hurt her from the way she had of continually and gingerly pressing the palm of her hand to it. Sometimes, however, she would cease her complaining, and love and mother him, uttering occasional series of gentle mellow sounds that were like croonings.

Hers was the only hand of affection that was laid on him at Cedarwild, and she was ever gentle, never pinching him, never pulling his ears. By the same token, he was the only friend she had; and he came to look forward to meeting her in the course of the morning work--and this, despite that every meeting always concluded in a scene, when she fought with her keeper against being taken away. Her cries and protests would give way to whimperings and wailings, while the men about laughed at the strangeness of the love-affair between her and the Irish terrier.

But Harris Collins tolerated, even encouraged, their friendship.

"The two sour-balls get along best together," he said. "And it does them good. Gives them something to live for, and that way lies health. But some day, mark my words, she'll turn on him and give him what for, and their friendship will get a terrible smash."

And half of it he spoke with the voice of prophecy, and, though she never

turned on Michael, the day in the world was written when their friendship would truly receive a terrible smash.

"Now seals are too wise," Collins explained one day, in a sort of extempore lecture to several of his apprentice trainers. "You've just got to toss fish to them when they perform. If you don't, they won't, and there's an end of it. But you can't depend on feeding dainties to dogs, for instance, though you can make a young, untrained pig perform creditably by means of a nursing bottle hidden up your sleeve."

"All you have to do is think it over. Do you think you can make those greyhounds extend themselves with the promise of a bite of meat? It's the whip that makes them extend.--Look over there at Billy Green. There ain't another way to teach that dog that trick. You can't love her into doing it. You can't pay her to do it. There's only one way, and that's make her."

Billy Green, at the moment, was training a tiny, nondescript, frizzly-haired dog. Always, on the stage, he made a hit by drawing from his pocket a tiny dog that would do this particular trick. The last one had died from a wrenched back, and he was now breaking in a new one. He was catching the little mite by the hind-legs and tossing it up in the air, where, making a half-flip and descending head first, it was supposed to alight with its forefeet on his hand and there balance itself, its hind feet and body above it in the air. Again and again he stooped, caught her hind-legs and flung her up into the half-turn. Almost frozen with

fear, she vainly strove to effect the trick. Time after time, and every time, she failed to make the balance. Sometimes she fell crumpled; several times she all but struck the ground: and once, she did strike, on her side and so hard as to knock the breath out of her. Her master, taking advantage of the moment to wipe the sweat from his streaming face, nudged her about with his toe till she staggered weakly to her feet.

"The dog was never born that'd learn that trick for the promise of a bit of meat," Collins went on. "Any more than was the dog ever born that'd walk on its forelegs without having its hind-legs rapped up in the air with the stick a thousand times. Yet you take that trick there. It's always a winner, especially with the women--so cunning, you know, so adorable cute, to be yanked out of its beloved master's pocket and to have such trust and confidence in him as to allow herself to be tossed around that way. Trust and confidence hell! He's put the fear of God into her, that's what."

"Just the same, to dig a dainty out of your pocket once in a while and give an animal a nibble, always makes a hit with the audience. That's about all it's good for, yet it's a good stunt. Audiences like to believe that the animals enjoy doing their tricks, and that they are treated like pampered darlings, and that they just love their masters to death. But God help all of us and our meal tickets if the audiences could see behind the scenes. Every trained-animal turn would be taken off the stage instanter, and we'd be all hunting for a job."

"Yes, and there's rough stuff no end pulled off on the stage right before the audience's eyes. The best fooler I ever saw was Lottie's. She had a bunch of trained cats. She loved them to death right before everybody, especially if a trick wasn't going good. What'd she do? She'd take that cat right up in her arms and kiss it. And when she put it down it'd perform the trick all right all right, while the audience applauded its silly head off for the kindness and humaneness she'd shown. Kiss it? Did she? I'll tell you what she did. She bit its nose."

"Eleanor Pavalo learned the trick from Lottie, and used it herself on her toy dogs. And many a dog works on the stage in a spiked collar, and a clever man can twist a dog's nose and nobody in the audience any the wiser. But it's the fear that counts. It's what the dog knows he'll get afterward when the turn's over that keeps most of them straight."

"Remember Captain Roberts and his great Danes. They weren't pure-breds, though. He must have had a dozen of them--toughest bunch of brutes I ever saw. He boarded them here twice. You couldn't go among them without a club in your hand. I had a Mexican lad laid up by them. He was a tough one, too. But they got him down and nearly ate him. The doctors took over forty stitches in him and shot him full of that Pasteur dope for hydrophobia. And he always will limp with his right leg from what the dogs did to him. I tell you, they were the limit. And yet, every time the curtain went up, Captain Roberts brought the house down with the first stunt. Those dogs just flocked all over him, loving him to death, from the looks of it. And were they loving him? They hated

him. I've seen him, right here in the cage at Cedarwild, wade into them with a club and whale the stuffing impartially out of all of them. Sure, they loved him not. Just a bit of the same old aniseed was what he used. He'd soak small pieces of meat in aniseed oil and stick them in his pockets. But that stunt would only work with a bunch of giant dogs like his. It was their size that got it across. Had they been a lot of ordinary dogs it would have looked silly. And, besides, they didn't do their regular tricks for aniseed. They did it for Captain Roberts's club. He was a tough bird himself."

"He used to say that the art of training animals was the art of inspiring them with fear. One of his assistants told me a nasty one about him afterwards. They had an off month in Los Angeles, and Captain Roberts got it into his head he was going to make a dog balance a silver dollar on the neck of a champagne bottle. Now just think that over and try to see yourself loving a dog into doing it. The assistant said he wore out about as many sticks as dogs, and that he wore out half a dozen dogs. He used to get them from the public pound at two and a half apiece, and every time one died he had another ready and waiting. And he succeeded with the seventh dog. I'm telling you, it learned to balance a dollar on the neck of a bottle. And it died from the effects of the learning within a week after he put it on the stage. Abscesses in the lungs, from the stick."

"There was an Englishman came over when I was a youngster. He had ponies, monkeys, and dogs. He bit the monkey's ears, so that, on the

stage, all he had to do was to make a move as if he was going to bite and they'd quit their fooling and be good. He had a big chimpanzee that was a winner. It could turn four somersaults as fast as you could count on the back of a galloping pony, and he used to have to give it a real licking about twice a week. And sometimes the lickings were too stiff, and the monkey'd get sick and have to lay off. But the owner solved the problem. He got to giving him a little licking, a mere taste of the stick, regular, just before the turn came on. And that did it in his case, though with some other case the monkey most likely would have got sullen and not acted at all."

It was on that day that Harris Collins sold a valuable bit of information to a lion man who needed it. It was off time for him, and his three lions were boarding at Cedarwild. Their turn was an exciting and even terrifying one, when viewed from the audience; for, jumping about and roaring, they were made to appear as if about to destroy the slender little lady who performed with them and seemed to hold them in subjection only by her indomitable courage and a small riding-switch in her hand.

"The trouble is they're getting too used to it," the man complained.

"Isadora can't prod them up any more. They just won't make a showing."

"I know them," Collins nodded. "They're pretty old now, and they're spirit-broken besides. Take old Sark there. He's had so many blank cartridges fired into his ears that he's stone deaf. And Selim--he lost his heart with his teeth. A Portuguese fellow who was handling him for

the Barnum and Bailey show did that for him. You've heard?"

"I've often wondered," the man shook his head. "It must have been a smash."

"It was. The Portuguese did it with an iron bar. Selim was sulky and took a swipe at him with his paw, and he whopped it to him full in the mouth just as he opened it to let out a roar. He told me about it himself. Said Selim's teeth rattled on the floor like dominoes. But he shouldn't have done it. It was destroying valuable property. Anyway, they fired him for it."

"Well, all three of them ain't worth much to me now," said their owner. "They won't play up to Isadora in that roaring and rampaging at the end. It really made the turn. It was our finale, and we always got a great hand for it. Say, what am I going to do about it anyway? Ditch it? Or get some young lions?"

"Isadora would be safer with the old ones," Collins said.

"Too safe," Isadora's husband objected. "Of course, with younger lions, the work and responsibility piles up on me. But we've got to make our living, and this turn's about busted."

Harris Collins shook his head.

"What d'ye mean?--what's the idea?" the man demanded eagerly.

"They'll live for years yet, seeing how captivity has agreed with them," Collins elucidated. "If you invest in young lions you run the risk of having them pass out on you. And you can go right on pulling the trick off with what you've got. All you've got to do is to take my advice . . . "

The master-trainer paused, and the lion man opened his mouth to speak.

"Which will cost you," Collins went on deliberately, "say three hundred dollars."

"Just for some advice?" the other asked quickly.

"Which I guarantee will work. What would you have to pay for three new lions? Here's where you make money at three hundred. And it's the simplest of advice. I can tell it to you in three words, which is at the rate of a hundred dollars a word, and one of the words is 'the.'"

"Too steep for me," the other objected. "I've got to make a living."

"So have I," Collins assured him. "That's why I'm here. I'm a specialist, and you're paying a specialist's fee. You'll be as mad as a hornet when I tell you, it's that simple; and for the life of me I can't understand why you don't already know it."

"And if it don't work?" was the dubious query.

"If it don't work, you don't pay."

"Well, shoot it along," the lion man surrendered.

"Wire the cage," said Collins.

At first the man could not comprehend; then the light began to break on him.

"You mean . . . ?"

"Just that," Collins nodded. "And nobody need be the wiser. Dry batteries will do it beautifully. You can install them nicely under the cage floor. All Isadora has to do when she's ready is to step on the button; and when the electricity shoots through their feet, if they don't go up in the air and rampage and roar around to beat the band, not only can you keep the three hundred, but I'll give you three hundred more. I know. I've seen it done, and it never misses fire. It's just as though they were dancing on a red-hot stove. Up they go, and every time they come down they burn their feet again.

"But you'll have to put the juice into them slowly," Collins warned.

"I'll show you how to do the wiring. Just a weak battery first, so as they can work up to it, and then stronger and stronger to the curtain.

And they never get used to it. As long as they live they'll dance just as lively as the first time. What do you think of it?"

"It's worth three hundred all right," the man admitted. "I wish I could make my money that easy."